

William Charles Cole Claiborne to Andrew Jackson, February 6, 1815, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

GOVERNOR CLAIBORNE TO JACKSON.

New Orleans, February 6, 1815.

Sir , Amidst that pressure of business which devolves on the Executive, *on this day* , which probably will bring the Session of the Legislature to its close, I seize *upon a moment* , to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 5th Instant.

The *unpleasant sensations* excited by the view you seem to have taken of the interest manifested by the executive and Legislature of this state, for the restoration of the slaves, who had escaped with the Enemy, *are greatly allayed* by your declaration, that *no bad motive is ascribed to us*. That *Being* , whom we all recognize as the Searcher and Judge of hearts, is indeed the Witness of the purity of our intentions. It is admitted, that it would be incompatible, with that dignified deportment, which it becomes the Representatives of the state to observe, and a degradation of that National Character of which we boast, to solicit and intreat the restoration of *stolen property* from an enemy who avows plunder and burning as legitimate modes of warfare; that as the Individual sufferers would disdain such humiliation, much stronger motives bind those, who represent the majesty of the state to abhor and avoid it; and I admire the conduct of the executive and Legislature of Virginia, who while their fellow Citizens were plundered of millions, scorned to debase the dignity of their stations by a *humiliating petition* to the plunderer, *for a restoration of the stolen property* . We hope and beleive that in a case *exactly parallel* , Louisiana would imitate the conduct of Virginia.

Library of Congress

But whatever may have been the conduct of *Admiral Cockburn*¹ and others, of the modern *Vandals* , in Virginia, yet it has been understood that General Lambert in Louisiana, had so far disapproved *the System of rapine* of other British commanders, as not to have considered the carrying of slaves, as a legitimate mode of Warfare. with what sincerity time will shew; for myself Sir, I strongly suspect, he will in the end, be found equally disposed *with his fellow marauders* , to commit all kind of excesses. But it is so understood that the slaves of our fellow citizens, “who had flocked to the British Army”, were only employed in the removal of the bag'age of the retreating Enemy and to your self, an assurance was given “that they would be delivered up *on application* ”. This application to be made by two or more respectable inhabitants, was in consequence contemplated, not in the form of an humble petition to *restore stolen property* , but a Request for the restoration of negroes to the service of their masters, whom the enemy does not chuse to retain.

1 Rear-Adm. Sir George Cockburn, whose marauding operations in the Chesapeake had caused much resentment.

You ask whether it be the province of the Governor and Legislature of any state in such a situation of affairs to send special commissioners or confidential deputations to the Enemy. The application to be made before the delivery of the slaves, is to proceed from their owners, *the State* , or the United States, *thro' their* Commanding General in the District. The first mode would certainly be irregular, but not so *the second* , provided it was done with the knowledge and consent of the officer commanding the forces of the United States in the State. The contemplated measure was communicated to you in my letter of the 31st ultimo, under a belief that your sanction would have freed it from all impropriety. If no previous inquiry was made, whether the *deputation in question* would be permitted to pass your guards, it was, because no idea or wish was entertained, *that they should* , unless orders were issued from your head quarters for that purpose. My impression has been that it was *not unlawful* for the State Government to send one or more messengers

Library of Congress

to “ *solicit*”, *ask for* and *receive* all negroes whom the Enemy was willing to leave behind; Surely Sir, the general who directs the operations of the war in this District, has the power to prevent it; But I do not see any wrong on the part of the state authorities in contemplating or proposing the measure. I know not whether the above observations will induce you to view *our conduct* in a more favourable light; but it will however remain a matter of regret, that *it* has been viewed as an intentional encroachment on your rights.

I feel too sensibly the *responsibility* attached to my own situation, willingly to assume *that* which belongs to another, and among the Rules which I have laid down for my own Government, there is not one to which I more strictly adhere, than that “of foregoing the exercise of my own powers, when it may be done without a dereliction of duty, *rather than in the least design to interfere with those of others*”.

I am Sir,